

# The Public's HEALTH

Winter 2003-04

Volume 6 Number 1

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## Office of Women's Health: A lot accomplished in two years

Traditionally, women's health focuses on reproductive health and breast and cervical cancer. Recently, however, the approach to women's health expanded to encompass the physical, mental, social, and economic factors that influence women's health status across the lifespan.

The RI Department of Health (HEALTH) established the Office of Women's Health about two years ago to "serve as the focal point for coordinating statewide efforts to assess the health needs and enhance the health status of women; and...integrate and oversee health programs, services, and resources that benefit women's health throughout the state."<sup>1</sup>

Representatives of all HEALTH divisions work with the Office of Women's Health to identify issues, problems, access and gaps in programs and services for women, and work to create linkages within HEALTH and other agencies to address the problems.

Among its responsibilities, the Office hosts an annual statewide conference on women's health. The 2002 conference, "The Face of Women's Health 65 and Over" featured Wanda Jones, MD, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health; Jana Hesser, PhD, from HEALTH, who provided health data on older women in Rhode Island; Laurie Robinson spoke on using data to affect policy on the regional level; and Annlouise Assaf, PhD, from Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island, who presented findings from the Women's Health Initiative Clinical Trial.

The 2003 conference, "The Face of Women's Health at Midlife," featured Marilyn Gaston, MD, co-author of the book *Prime Time: The African American Women's Complete Guide to Midlife*

*Health and Wellness*; Jana Hesser, PhD, who presented data on Rhode Island women 45 – 64 years of age; Rose Weaver who performed "Menopause Mama". Dr. Gaston's message stressed the importance of personal harmony of mind, body and spirit to achieve and maintain optimal health and well-being. Women are caregivers for others, she said, and need to recognize and value self-care. Weaver's performance provided an



*The Office of Women's Health : Program Manager Nancy Sutton, MS, RD.; Medical Director Sharon Marable, MD, MPH; Coordinator Nancy Libby Fisher, MMHS*

educational message in an entertaining and engaging way. Dr. Hesser identified major health issues of mid-life women and contrasted this data with that of older women.

The Office also produced two Health Policy Briefs. The first, *Office of Women's Health: Assessing and Enhancing the Health Status of*

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## An Advisory Committee offers Rhode Island residents an opportunity to work with Health's Office of Women's Health

Rhode Island women have the second lowest rate of educational attainment and the second highest rates of poverty among the New England states. Women who live in poverty or have less than a high school education have shorter life spans; higher rates of illness, injury, disability and death; and more limited access to high quality health care services.<sup>1</sup> There is a high correlation between lower literacy levels, poverty and poorer health status.

The Office of Women's Health Advisory Committee, responsible for working with the RI Department of Health (HEALTH) to enhance the health status of Rhode Island women, has established specific goals and objectives to address this underlying factor in health disparities. The Committee will involve and enlist the input of women throughout the state in their work; collaborate with institutions of higher education to pursue policy initiatives; and review materials provided by HEALTH to ensure they are culturally sensitive, reflect appropriate literacy levels and address needs of the targeted audience (e.g., Braille, large print).

Adult committee members and teen ambassadors, appointed by Director of Health Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH, represent diverse perspectives in age, geography, race, ethnicity, economics, ability, education, and profession. Ex-officio members, also active participants on the committee, include a representative of HEALTH, the chair of the Rhode Island Commission on Women, and the US DHHS Region I Coordinators for the Office on Women's Health and the Office of Minority Health.

Last May, the Committee hosted the first National Women's Health Check-up Day at the State House, co-sponsored by Rhode Island First Lady Suzanne Carcieri and Dr. Nolan. In November they sponsored a Women's Health Empowerment Meeting to obtain feedback about women's health issues and concerns from community spokespeople and stakeholders.



The Advisory Committee created three committees to carry out the objectives of their strategic plan. A Public Forums Committee will coordinate and host several public forums throughout the state

in 2004 to assess the status of women's health and the effectiveness of the health care system. The Legislative Committee will identify legislation pertaining to women's health and recommend educational support activity. The Assessment Committee will identify the unmet needs and gaps in health care for Rhode Island women. All three committees are open for public participation.

Planned events for 2004 include the Heart Truth for Women Breakfast at the Marriott (Orms St.) Hotel on February 20, and the Women's Health Check-Up Day on May 10.

For more information about Advisory Committee bi-monthly meetings, contact Venus at the Office of Women's Health at 222-1171.

<sup>1</sup> Office on Women's Health, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services.

### ***Women's Health***

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*Women in Rhode Island*, offers comparisons within three major health issues: physical activities levels for Rhode Island women at various ages; overweight and obesity among Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic Rhode Island women; and tobacco use among Rhode Island adolescent girls and boys.

The second brief, *Osteoporosis Program: Priorities Identified to Address Issues Related to the Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment of Osteoporosis*, highlighted the burden of this disease, prevalence figures, factors that lead to the development of osteoporosis, and activities of the Osteoporosis Program to address the problem.

Two additional briefs, one on HIV and AIDS and the other on sexual assaults, are under development.

<sup>1</sup> Rhode Island Legislative Appropriation, August 7, 2001

# What exactly is Osteoporosis and what is Rhode Island doing about it?

Osteoporosis means “porous bone”. Bones become brittle and break easily. It is considered a “silent disease,” going undetected until a fracture occurs, pain exists, or there is a loss in height. Low bone mass, the precursor to osteoporosis, also increases the risk of bone fractures.

Currently, about 44 million people in the United States and an estimated 172,600 in Rhode Island suffer from osteoporosis or low bone mass. Although Caucasian and Asian women are at highest risk for developing osteoporosis, women of all ethnic and racial groups are at high risk; it is also seen in men. In 2000, the National Institutes of Health publicly identified osteoporosis as a public health threat. Both the US Preventive Services Task Force and the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) established medical guidelines to ensure women do not go undiagnosed. If untreated, this disease can be debilitating and life altering.

Dr. Ethel Siris from Columbia University shared the findings of her research at the US Surgeon General’s Workshop on Osteoporosis and Bone

- about 50 percent of all hip fracture victims become disabled for the remainder of their lives, never returning to their prefracture level of independence; and
- osteoporosis is preventable and treatable.

The State Legislature formed the Rhode Island Osteoporosis Program in 1997, housing it at the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH). Currently, the Program’s main goal is to increase awareness of osteoporosis and reduce the number of people going undiagnosed in Rhode Island. A Health Policy Brief: *Osteoporosis Program: Priorities Identified to Address Issues Related to the Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment of Osteoporosis* was released in May 2003.

Nancy Sutton, MS, RD, program manager, is working closely with the Rhode Island Osteoporosis Coalition (RIOC) to achieve the these goals. Collaborative efforts include the following:

- The *Osteoporosis State Plan*, completed in April 2003. It serves as a guide to address osteoporosis on four

fronts: public education, professional education, advocacy, and surveillance. An *Osteoporosis Surveillance Plan* should be completed by the end of January.

- Collaboration with

the NOF to provide grand rounds in seven hospitals throughout the state in 2004. These NOF-sponsored rounds will reach physicians and other health professionals and will address the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of osteoporosis.

- An osteoporosis education campaign planned for 2004. This campaign will include:
  - the National Arthritis Foundation’s *Osteoporosis and You!* classes offered to the public in at least 19 Rhode Island locations;
  - state-wide distribution of information via paycheck stuffers;

Osteoporosis Prevalence Figures for Ages 50 and Over, Rhode Island, 2002				
Women - Osteoporosis	Women - Low Bone Mass	Men - Osteoporosis	Men - Low Bone Mass	Total Men and Women Osteoporosis and LBM
32,400	86,700	8,800	44,700	172,600

Health in December, 2002. She reported that 44 percent of the 200,000 women in her study over the age of 50 had either osteoporosis or low bone mass. Up until the study, these women were undiagnosed and did not know of their condition. Unfortunately, this may be true nationally.

In Rhode Island it is estimated that more than 50 percent of the women and men over the age of 50 suffer from osteoporosis or low bone mass. According to the NOF, one-half of women over the age of 50 will experience an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime.

In addition,

- about 24 percent of hip-fracture victims over the age of 50 die within the year following the injury;

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## Health Library part of Information Access Grant

The Health Library at the RI Department of Health, along with 12 members of the Association of Rhode Island Health Sciences Libraries (ARIHSL), received a grant of \$36,100 from the Rhode Island Office of Library



Deborah Porrazzo

and Information Services (OLIS) for a project entitled "The Heart of the Matter: Improving Health Information Access in Rhode Island." The funds will allow the libraries to integrate their collections into an online catalog system shared by nine academic libraries belonging Rhode Island's Higher Education Library Network (HELIN).

In an era of declining library budgets, the grant enables the group to share its collections of books and audio-visual material, estimated worth more than \$1.5 million, with concentration in health-related fields such as pre-clinical sciences, surgery, nursing, allied health

medicine, health care administration, public health, bioterrorism, consumer health and behavioral health. The expanded online catalog system will give physicians, nurses, administrators and allied health professionals improved access to health information with an innovative model of resource sharing and expanded library access.

"This is a very exciting time for the Health Library and ARIHSL colleagues," says Deborah Porrazzo, HEALTH's Coordinator of Library Services. "We are looking forward to benefiting from both the technological infrastructure of the HELIN catalog and resource sharing with other Rhode Island Libraries. The grant will enable us to provide more cost effective, timely and comprehensive interlibrary loan services for HEALTH staff. And, we will finally have a dynamic online searchable catalog of the books at the Rhode Island Department of Health."

Other participating hospital libraries include Butler, Eleanor Slater, Kent, Landmark, Lifespan, Memorial, Newport, Roger Williams, St. Joseph and South County and the Veterans' Administration and Naval Base Medical Centers.

OLIS received funds for "The Heart of the Matter: Improving Health Information Access in Rhode Island" and other library projects from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, under the federal Library Services and Technology Act.

### Osteoporosis

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- bus signs displaying the campaign slogan;
- and media coverage and news articles in April, May, and June.

For more information on the Osteoporosis Program or to become involved with the Rhode Island Osteoporosis Coalition, please contact Nancy Sutton at 222-1383. Newly updated osteoporosis information will be available on the HEALTH website ([www.HEALTH.ri.gov](http://www.HEALTH.ri.gov)) by February 2004.

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*Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe  
and Healthy Communities*